DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 146 558 CS 003 765

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TITLE Report on Phase III (Interest, Comprehension, & Readability) Prepublication Learner Verification of "Phantoms and Fantasies," Seventh Reader and "Gnomes and Knots," Eighth Reader of "Reading Basics Plus," Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.
INSTITUTION Harper and Row, Publishers, Inc., New York, N.Y.
PUB DATE Jun 77
NOTE 12p.; See related documents ED 142 935 and CS 003 764

EDRS PRICE MF-$0.83 HC-$1.67 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS *Basic Reading; Comprehension; Glossaries; Grade 7; Grade 8; Interest; Junior High Schools; *Readability; *Reading Materials; *Textbook Preparation; *Textbook Research; Vocabulary

ABSTRACT

The seventh-grade and eighth-grade program of "Reading Basics Plus" consists of an integrated set of texts, workbooks, and teacher's guidebooks. By a process of small group trials, students' and teachers' reactions to the proposed content of this program were obtained in order to provide editors and contributors with useful information about interest level, readability, comprehensibility, and vocabulary in the proposed selections. Results indicated that pupil interest in the material was high and that the level of reading difficulty in the materials was appropriate for the grades in which it was tested. In addition, detailed information was gathered regarding specific difficult words in the proposed selections. This information was used in the development of glossaries and teacher's editions for the program. (GW)

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# Report on Phase III Interest, Comprehension, & Readability Prepublication Learner Verification of Phantoms and Fantasies, Seventh Reader and Gnomes and Knots, Eighth Reader of Reading Basics Plus

Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc.

June, 1977

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## INTRODUCTION

Harper & Row, Publishers, Inc. is publishing a reading-literature program for the seventh and eighth grades as part of its program called Reading Basics Plus. Acting as contributors to the seventh and eighth grade program are Eric P. Hamp, Lilyan Harchly, Joseph A. Lucero, Delores Minor, Elliott Ross, Marian Schilling, Robert Shatter, and Mattie Claybrook Williams. In final published form, Phantoms and Fantasies and Gnomes and Knots consists of an integrated set of texts, workbooks, and teacher's guide books.

This prepublication learner verification study was an effort to gain student and teacher reaction to the proposed content of the texts. Contributors and editors needed information regarding the interest level, ease of comprehension, readability, general appropriateness, and vocabulary of the proposed selections.

## THE STUDY

Each of the books is divided into four collections. Typewritten copies of some of the proposed selections derived from all collections were made available for the study. No art was available. With the aid of our Sales Representatives, a group of ten schools was obtained to try the five selections from Phantoms and Fantasies, the seventh grade text, and a different group of ten schools to try the five selections from Gnomes and Knots, the eight grade text.

The schools were selected to provide a good small-scale sample of urban, suburban and rural backgrounds. Community size and locatqon were controlled and the sample used schools from a widespread geographic area. Schools helping in this study were located in Colorado, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Michigan, Ohio, Pennsylvania, and Utah.

In each school a teacher, at the appropriate level, was asked to have "a representative group of 15 students" from one class read each selection, answer on an attached sheet certain comprehension questions, and rate the selection by indicating whether they liked it very much, some, or not at all. After the students read and responded to a selection, the teacher was asked to discuss the material with the students, using the comprehension questions as a guide. On the basis of that discussion and the teacher's personal reading of the material, each teacher was asked to rate the group of sample students on their overall reading ability, their interest in the selection, and the readability or "reading difficulty level" of the story. The teachers were also asked to provide information on the time it took the students to read the material. The three ratings were done on one-to-five scales: low to high for the ability and difficulty questions, and poor to excellent for the interest question. An exhibit of the rating sheet can be found at the end of this report.

Teachers were also asked to provide a list of specific words, if there were any, that gave the children difficulty. This list helped our editors and contributors in the development of teacher edition materials. Teachers could develop such a list either from listening to the students read the selection orally, or by asking the students to keep track of words they had trouble with during their silent reading of the selection.

The teacher questionnaire also asked teachers if there were any parts of the material that were "offensive, embarrassing, or inappropriate for the students" and, in another question, asked them for any comments they would like to make: likes, dislikes, other difficulties, etc.

ANALYSIS OF FINDING

Charts 1, 2, and 3, which follow, show the composite results of the teachers' rating of the selections by grade level of the two books. The ratings were based on the following questions: "How would you characterize the overall reading ability of your group?"(chart 1) "How would you characterize this story with respect to pupils' interest?" (chart 2) "How would you characterize this story with respect to reading difficulty level for your group?" (chart 3) Each teacher indicated the ability of the group being used for each selection. The composition of the group might change from selection to selection. For example, at grade seven, the collection contained five selections so each reporting teacher had to indicate the ability of five different groups of students. As a result, there were a total of (53) responses to teachers (One teacher used two groups for three selections).

Our contributors and editors were pleased by the storng favorable response to the selections that showed up in teachers' rating of pupils' interest, as indicated on Chart 2. The high interest level of the material was also identified in the students' own rating of the material, which will be discussed later.

Since the selections were chosen and edited with the objective of matching reading difficulty with the reading level of average students, Chart 3 shows a very satisfactory result. Specific selections, of course, rated above and below the average. Information on individual selections made a specific contribution to our editorial effort and is considered proprietary in nature.

Chart 1

Teacher Rating of Student Ability

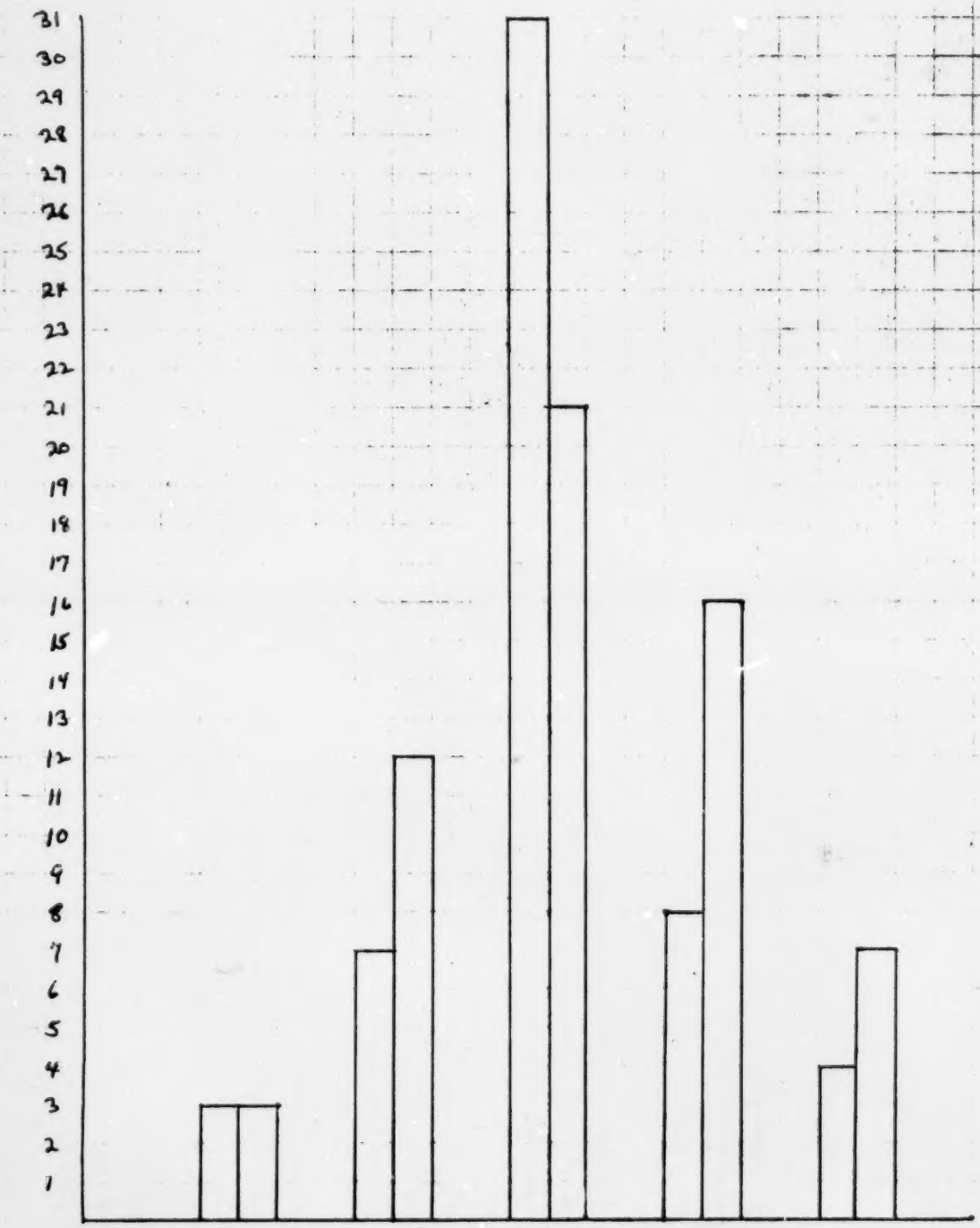


Chart 2

Teacher Rating of Student Interest

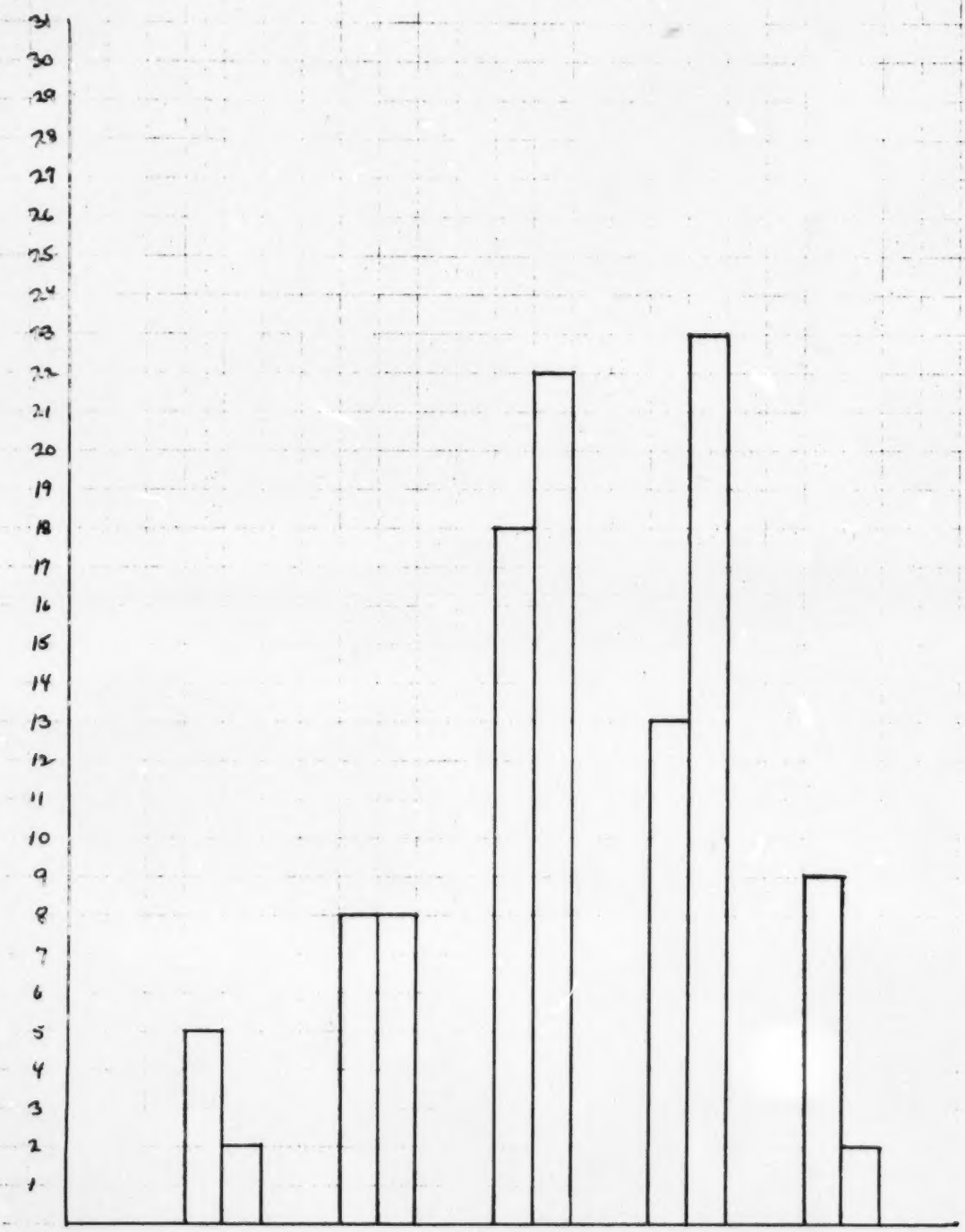
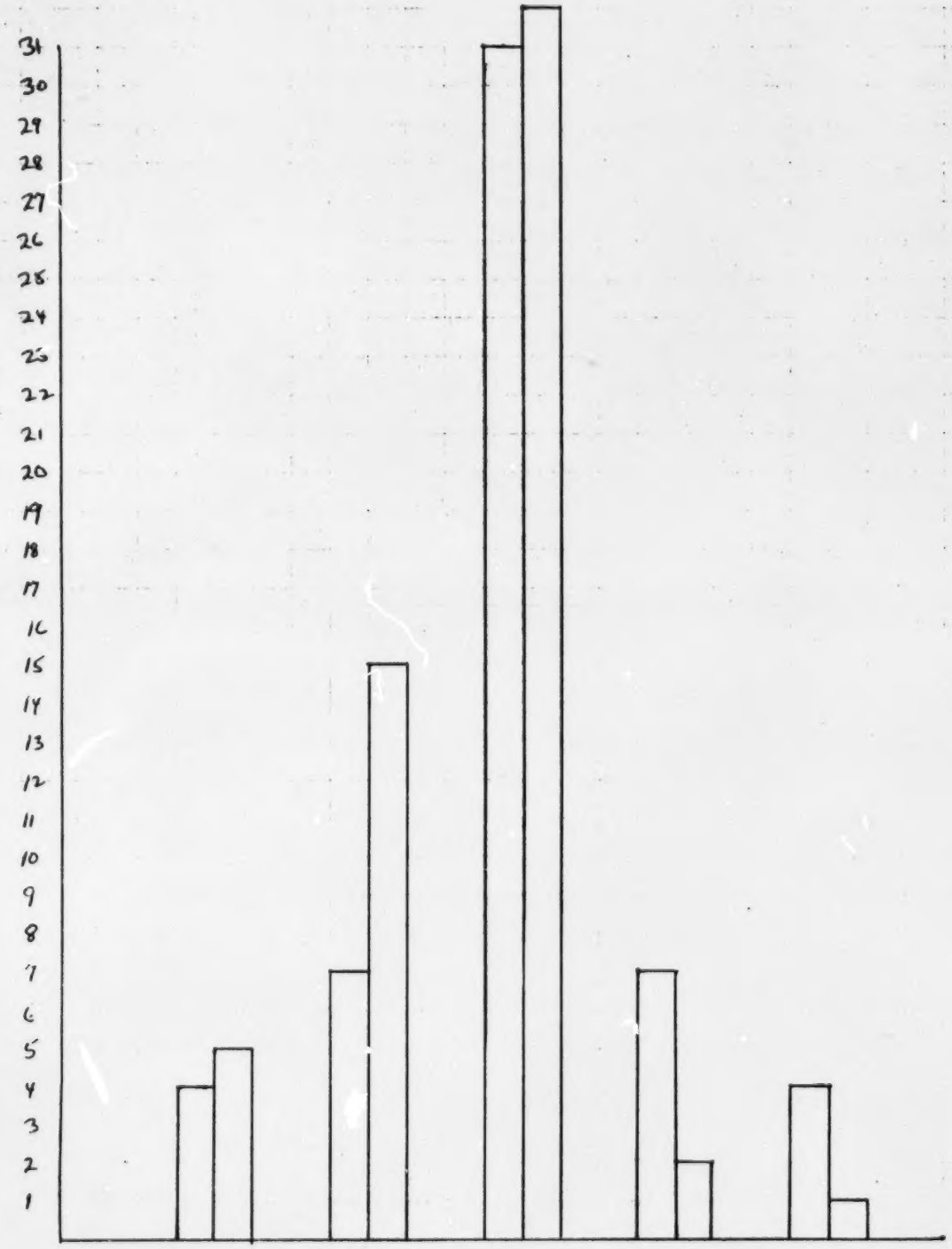


Chart 3

Teacher Rating of Reading Difficulty Level



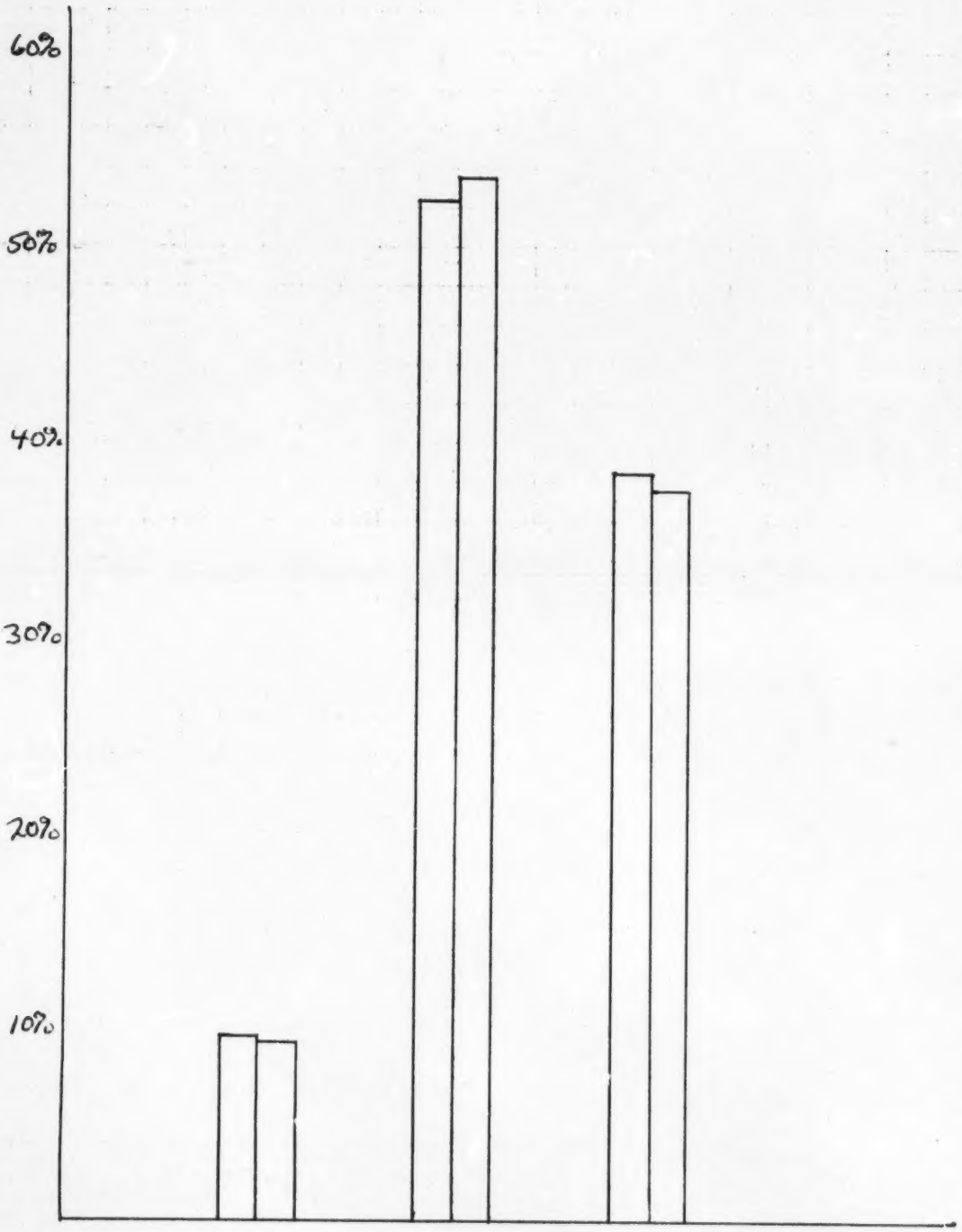
After our asking for the use of a representative group of students, it may be noticed that the eighth grade teachers tended, by their own later rating, to use groups that were somewhat more above level than below level (chart 1). If we consider the teacher ratings accurate, it does provide an explanation of the favorable but somewhat lower rating of student interest that is indicated by the eighth grade teachers as opposed to the rating provided by the seventh grade teachers. Also, the lower rating of reading difficulty provided by the eighth grade collection teachers as opposed to the seventh grade teachers may be explained. Evidently the higher ability eighth grade students thought the eighth grade text was at or somewhat below their reading level and their interest in the selections, because of an above maturity level, was average or above, but not high.

When the students were asked directly to indicate how much they liked a selection, the two groups of students rated their collections at almost precisely the same levels with the majority indicating either "very much" or "OK" (chart 4).

Perhaps teacher perceptions are involved in the differences between what the students think about the story as indicated directly as opposed to the evaluation of their response by the teacher. Other possible factors are: timing--the student's direct response was made immediately after reading the selection while the discussion from which the teacher inferred the student response took place at some later time, and teacher influence-- it is possible that the teacher's own evaluation of the story influenced the students response to it (either before reading or in the discussion following reading) and that the teacher then evaluated the response by the students to the teacher's own reaction.

Chart 4

Student Rating of Selections



As mentioned previously, from one to three recall-type, comprehension questions were asked of the students after they had read the selections, but before any group discussion took place. This was to provide a quick check on the comprehenison of the students, the success of which reinforced the validity of selection time, interest and readability results. No teaching of the comprehension skills took place in this phase of the learner verification study (see the "Report of Phase II (skills) Prepublication Learner Verification Reading Basics Plus" for teaching results.) Totaling correct and incorrect responses for the collections provided the following results: 7th grade, 72% correct - 28% incorrect; 8th grade, 79% correct - 21% incorrect. The students were, in general, reading with understanding. Better scores by the 8th grade students might be attributable to their high ability as a group as rated by the teachers or to the differences in the questions asked.

One type of data that proved especially helpful the editors and contributors cannot be summarized in any statistical fashion. Information on the words causing difficulty was used by editors and contributors in developing teacher's guide materials. The glossographers also used the difficult-word lists in their work of building useful glossaries for each book.

SUMMARY

By a process of small group trials, student and teacher reaction to the proposed content of the seventh and eighth grade levels of Reading Basics Plus was obtained that provided editors and contributors with useful information about the interest level, readability, comprehensibility and vocabulary in the proposed selections. Results, in general, indicated that pupil interest in the material

was high and that it was on grade level with respect to reading difficulty.

In addition, detailed information was developed regarding specific difficult words in the proposed selections. This information was used extensively in the development of glossaries and teacher's editions for Reading Basics Plus.

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